

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT M 00847 060301Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
/066 W

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R 050625Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3337
INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
CINCPAC HONOLULU

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PP
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY SESSION ABRUPTLY ENDED

REF: PORT MORESBY 783

1. SUMMARY: ON THE PRETEXT THAT NO FURTHER BUSINESS REMAINED, THE PARLIAMENT ROSE UNEXPECTEDLY ON JUNE 1. IN FACT, THE SESSION WAS NOT GOING WELL AND PARLIAMENT COULD HAVE GOTTEN OUT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTROL HAD IT RUN ITS COURSE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THE AFTERNOON OF JUNE 1 THAT IT HAD NO MORE BUSINESS AND MOVED THAT PARLIAMENT RISE. 29 MEMBERS HAD PRIVATE BILLS PENDING AND RESENTED THE GOVERNMENT'S MOVE. THE VOTE TO RISE WAS CLOSE, 36-31. FOLLOWING THE VOTE MINISTER FOR LANDS SALI, WHO WAS HANDLING GOVERNMENT BUSINESS, TOLD THE PRESS THAT AN ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION IN THE GOVERNMENT'S MOVE WAS THE QUEENS BIRTHDAY HOLIDAY ON JUNE 12 AND THE DESIRE NOT TO

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HAVE PARLIAMENTARIANS FLYING HOME WHEN THE PUBLIC WANTED TO GET AWAY ON A THREESDAY WEEKEND.

3. THESE FLIMSY PRETEXTS FOOLED NO ONE. THE GOVERNMENT FIRST HAD TO BACK OFF ON THE LEADERSHIP CODE EARLY IN THE SESSION (REFTEL). FROM THAT POINT ON THE SITUATION DETERIORATED. IT SEEMED THAT A MAJORITY WAS

GETTING OUT OF HAND. THERE WERE A NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTARY FACTORS. FIRST, THE GOVERNMENT WHIP WAS AMONG THOSE WHO CROSSED TO SUPPORT OKUK AS NEW LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION. IN THAT CASE, HE DID SO OUT OF RESENTMENT. HIS DISTRICT HAD BEEN PROMISED A CEMENT PLANT AND A SUBSEQUENT DECISION WAS MADE TO PLACE IT ELSEWHERE. OPPOSITION MPS TOLD US BOTH THEY AND A NUMBER OF GOVERNMENT BACKBENCHERS ARE INCREASINGLY RESENTFUL OVER UNFULFILLED PROMISES OF PROJECTS IN THEIR DISTRICTS. SECOND, OKUK IS A MORE DYNAMIC LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION AND HE CHALLENGED THE GOVERNMENT TIME AFTER TIME. WHILE HE DID NOT HAVE THE VOTES TO CARRY MOTIONS, HE DID CHANGE THE ATMOSPHERE IN PARLIAMENT. THIRD, THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT HANDLE BUSINESS WELL GENERALLY. ONE GLARING EXAMPLE DEALT WITH A MOTION APPROVED IN LAST SESSION TO ASK AUSTRALIA, JAPAN AND THE U.S. FOR WAR REPARATIONS PAYMENTS. DEFENCE MINISTER EXPRESSED THE GOVERNMENT'S OPPOSITION TO SEEKING SUCH PAYMENTS IN A LONG, BORING SPEECH DRAFTED BY HIS AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH OFFICER WHO HAD GIVEN HIM WHAT AMOUNTED TO A LENGTHY STATEMENT ESSENTIALLY PRAISING ALL AUSTRALIA HAD DONE FOR PNG. TO TOP IT OFF, MONA READ THE SPEECH IN ENGLISH, A LANGUAGE HE CAN BARELY READ ALOUD. EVEN PITA LUS, ONE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S SENIOR MINISTERS, SAID HE WAS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT - WHICH HAD BADLY MISREAD THE MOOD OF PARLIAMENT.

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4. SOMARE SAYS HE WILL INTRODUCE THE LEADERSHIP CODE DURING THE AUGUST SESSION. IF PANGU GIVES HIM FULL SUPPORT HE MIGHT CARRY SEVERAL BILLS NEEDED TO ENACT THE CODE. HOWEVER, THE PACKAGE INCLUDES AN ORGANIC LAW REQUIRING A TWO-THIRDS VOTE AND THAT HE CANNOT GET. IF PUBLIC OPINION CAN BE MOLDED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY HE MIGHT HAVE A GOOD ISSUE WITH WHICH TO GO TO THE PEOPLE. IN THE MEANTIME THE AUGUST SESSION PROMISES TO BE UNPREDICTABLE AND PROBABLY RAUCOUS.

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